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ST. CHRISTOPHER, WEST INDIES.

BY

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A correct and reliable knowledge of the West Indies is obtained only by a careful study of each island composing the group. The individual peculiarities of each island constitute the most surprising, and certainly not the least interesting, feature of this study. This island-peculiarity characterizes to a greater or less degree the geology, the geography, the climate, the flora, the history, and the occupations of the people. Of course, there are some things which may be truly said of the whole group; but these general statements are fewer and less trustworthy than is generally realized. In the hope, therefore, of contributing something of real value to the much recently written about the West Indies, this paper is prepared, taking for consideration the little island of St. Christopher, or St. Kitts, as it is very generally known.

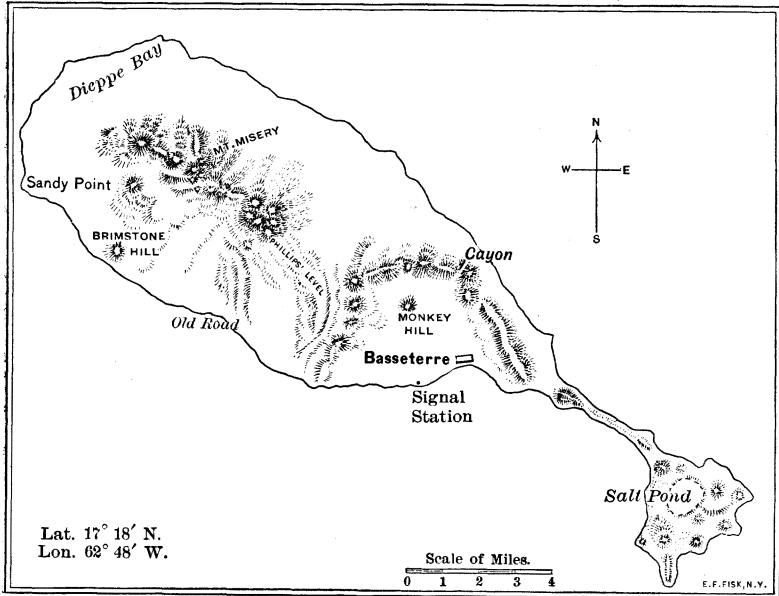
This island has a most charming political history; but it would be foreign to the main purpose of this paper to follow this line further than to say that at the time of its discovery, in 1493, it was inhabited by the fierce and war-like Carib Indians, among whom the island was known by the name of *Laimuiga*, meaning the fertile. Columbus, the discoverer, however, chose to call it St. Christopher, which name it still bears, notwithstanding the English tried many years ago to give it the name of St. Kitts. It must be confessed that the Indian name is the more appropriate. To the English, led by Sir Thomas Warner, belongs the credit for its colonisation, which began in 1623. It is the oldest English settlement in the West Indies. To establish and maintain this colony, and to acquire an undisputed title to the island, England has given freely of both blood and treasure; and it is not too much to say, perhaps, that no other one of her present possessions, considering its size and relative importance, was so dearly purchased. The island is now an English Crown Colony, being one of the "Leeward Islands," the seat of government of which is at Antigua. Local affairs are under the direction of an Administrator, aided by a Council.

Geologically considered, the island is of volcanic formation, as abundantly shown by the presence of thick layers of volcanic scoriæ,

known as *lapidi*. These ashes or cinders are found near the surface, and at great depths, in all parts of the island. At Sandy Point, for instance, layers of volcanic dust alternate with layers of soil for a depth of seventy-five feet, on a substratum of gravel. The soil is a dark-grey loam, very porous, and highly adapted to the cultivation of sugar cane. Clay may be found in the high lands, but not in the low.

The accompanying outline map gives a very correct idea of the geographical position and topography of the island. As indicated thereon, the central portion is occupied by a range of lofty, rugged mountains, crowded together, as it were, and intersected here and

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there by rocky precipices. The culminating point of this mountain range is near the north end of the island, and is known as Mount Misery. This mountain is more than four thousand feet high, and is an extinct volcano, the crater of which is regarded as one of the most interesting features of the island, especially by tourists. From fissures in the sides and bottom of this crater issue constantly sulphurous fumes, and some places are too hot to stand upon with comfort—the water in some of the springs being hot enough to cook an egg. There is also within the crater a beautiful lake. From the “lip” of the crater to the bottom is about 600 feet.

From the southeastern end of the main body of the island extends a long narrow neck, which spreads out fan-like, and upon which rise a number of conical hills and mountains. The entire length of the island is about twenty-three miles, and the average breadth of the main body is about five miles, giving a total area of something like sixty-eight square miles, of which only about 13,400 acres are suitable for cultivation, the remainder being used as wood and pasture lands.

The climate of St. Christopher, for a tropical one, is decidedly healthful and temperate, being absolutely free from extremes of heat and cold. The average temperature for the year is less than 79° F., while the annual mean daily range of the temperature is less than ten degrees. The month of February, closely followed by the month of March, is the coolest month of the year—the average temperature being about 76° F., and the average daily range less than nine degrees. The month of August, with an average temperature slightly above 81° F., and an average daily range of less than nine degrees, is the hottest month, with September not far behind. These summer temperatures may appear to be too high to be comfortable; but owing to the fresh and constant trades this heat is robbed of its otherwise oppressive nature, so that one does not often feel uncomfortably warm except when exposed to the direct rays of the sun. The records at the United States Weather Bureau at Basseterre show that the highest temperature for 1899 was 89° F., and the lowest 64° F., thus giving an absolute range of only twenty-five degrees. The same records show the relative humidity of the air to be about seventy-five per cent., on an average, for the year. Rainfall is frequent but not heavy; rains occur on an average of every other day. Records for many years back show the total rainfall for the island to average about fifty-nine inches for the year. From local causes certain parts of the island have much more rain than others. The fall is well adapted to the cultivation of sugar cane; the greatest amount falls in September and October, and the least in February and March. Taking it all in all, the month of May most nearly approaches the normal meteorological conditions for the year. The barometric range is very small, being less than .09 inch for the year. The prevailing winds are from the east, with an average velocity of about ten miles per hour. Situated, as it is, in or near the usual path of the West Indian hurricanes, the island is occasionally devastated by one of these. But this does not occur every year by any means; it is sometimes fifteen or twenty years between visits.

The island is also subject to earthquakes, but these are, or have been, comparatively harmless.

The present population consists of white, colored, and black persons—about 30,000 altogether. Practically, all of these depend upon wages earned by labor for a support. As the land is owned chiefly by persons residing elsewhere, very few of the people here are able to own or rent any land; and as the only industry of any consequence is the sugar industry, the business of the island is measured by this one crop: if the crop is good, and the price fair, all goes well; but if the crop is short, and the price of sugar low, then follows a most wretched condition of affairs, especially among the poor laborers. Owing to the depressed condition of the sugar industry and the short crop last year—due to the hurricanes—there has been quite an exodus of laborers from this island to the more prosperous ones. There have been efforts made to develop “minor crops,” but without practical results. Many plants, such as cotton, tobacco, coffee, etc., do well here; but the owners of the estates do not seem to realize so much from these crops, and hence they are abandoned. There is no question that sugar is *the* crop of the island—better suited to the soil than any other.

At one time the exportation of salt, taken from the pond shown on the map, was both extensive and profitable; but, although the yield and quality of the salt are as good as ever, this industry has been abandoned.

A very great historic interest attaches to Brimstone Hill, as it was at one time a strong fort, and the scene of many bloody engagements. It has been abandoned for a number of years.

To attempt to convey an adequate idea of the exquisite beauty and vernal richness of the flora of a tropical island is positively hopeless: these must be seen to be appreciated. Particularly is this true of St. Kitts, which is often called the “Garden of the West Indies.” Here may be seen plants and flowers in endless varieties; leaves and flowers of every hue and color; ferns, from the tiniest to the gigantic tree fern; fruits in great variety; useful woods and ornamental trees, vines, orchids, etc. To give a list of all these would be far beyond the limit of this paper.

I feel constrained, however, to mention a few of the fruits to be had on the island. Speaking in a general way, I may say that tropical fruits, as compared with the fruits of temperate climates, appear to be rather insipid, and one must “learn to like them” after using the fruits of the colder climates;

Bread Fruit— <i>Artocarpus incisa</i> .	Guava— <i>Psidium montanum</i> .
Avocado Pear— <i>Persea gratissima</i> .	Pawpaw— <i>Carica papaya</i> .
Mango— <i>Mangifera indica</i> .	Plantain— <i>Musa paradisiaca</i> .
Tamarind— <i>Tamarindus indica</i> .	Chenip— <i>Melicocca bifuga</i> .
Granadilla— <i>Passiflora quadrangularis</i> .	Nutmeg— <i>Myristica moschata</i> .
Belle Apple— <i>Passiflora laurifolia</i> .	Shaddock— <i>Citrus Pompelmous decu-</i>
Arnotto— <i>Bixa orillana</i> .	mana.
Banana— <i>Musa sapientum</i> .	Orange— <i>Citrus bigaradia</i> .
Sapodilla— <i>Sapota achras</i> .	Orange— <i>Citrus aurantium</i> .
Cocoanut— <i>Cocos nucifera</i> .	Lemon— <i>Citrus medica</i> (varietas <i>limo-</i>
Cassava— <i>Janipha utilis</i> and <i>manihot</i> .	num).
Cashew— <i>Anacardium occidentale</i> .	Lime— <i>Citrus aurantium</i> (varietas <i>spino-</i>
Almond— <i>Terminalia catappa</i> .	sissima).
Aloe— <i>Aloe vulgaris</i> .	Icaco Plum— <i>Chrysobalanus icaco</i> .

In many cases there are several varieties of the fruit mentioned above.